

Growing pains addressed in budget

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"Balanced growth" was the theme as the Government of Saskatchewan released its 2013-14 budget.

The province is growing and Premier Brad Wall has set a population target of 1.2 million people by 2020. But with growth comes growing pains.

The challenges associated with a growing province include increased pressure on the healthcare system, infrastructure, and the education system.

With its recent budget, the government is allocating 96 per cent of its total expenses on health, education and post-secondary education. This includes \$3 billion to be spent on healthcare, including \$29 million to be given to the health regions to deal with population growth.

"We're providing \$11.6 billion dollars in a whole host of areas," said Finance Minister Ken Krawetz. "We're dealing with greater utilization in healthcare because of population demand; we're providing over \$17 million to the education system to deal with increased enrolments. When you look across all ministries, we're meeting the challenge of a growing population."

The government also increased spending on infrastructure projects, totalling \$847.5 million, the most since the 2009-10 budget. "One of the very real challenges of course is infrastructure," said Krawetz. "With a decaying infrastructure, and then the need to rebuild that infrastructure plus to create new infrastructure, that's the pressure."

However, the opposition NDP is calling the budget a "credit-card budget," alleging that it will have serious implications on future generations.

"(The budget) really fails to support Saskatchewan's growth," said finance critic Trent Witherspoon.

Witherspoon stressed that the budget fails to sufficiently support the education system.

"We see nothing meaningful on this front to alleviate the strain and pressure that's in our classrooms, on our students, and we need to do a better job of making sure we're making education a priority, understanding what it means to the future of students, but

Provincial Budget 2013



Premier Brad Wall speaks to the media after his government tabled their 2013-14 provincial budget.

Photo by Braden Dupuis

"One of the very real challenges of course is infrastructure. With a decaying infrastructure, and then the need to rebuild that infrastructure plus to create new infrastructure, that's the pressure."

- Ken Krawetz

what it also means to the future of our province, economically, socially and otherwise," he said.

Janet Foord, president of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, was also disappointed with the government's budget in respect to education.

"It's a status quo budget. It does not represent the premier's growth agenda," she said.

"It allows us to continue doing what we're doing, but there's not enough money in there to address the aboriginal/non-aboriginal achievement rate or the graduation rate."

'It's going to be tough sluggin'

Dietrich Neu
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The University of Regina's worst case scenario is now officially a reality.

The provincial government released the 2013-14 budget Wednesday. Post-secondary institutions will receive a 2.1 per cent funding increase to their operating budgets, equaling \$9.2 million and well short of what they hoped for.

The U of R alone requested an increase of five per cent; the increase it got amounts to over \$3 million less than that.

The funding shortfall will "significantly impair the University of Regina's ability to maintain the quality of its programs," according to the U of R's operations forecast document.

Saskatchewan ranks seventh amongst provinces and territories in post-secondary spending relative to its GDP. Wednesday's announcement means more programs and faculty positions could be cut.

"We have told post-secondary institutions around the province that this is going to be a lean year," said Don Morgan, minister of advanced education. "Resource revenue is down, so there will naturally be a leveling off. We think that this is an appropriate thing that we are doing."

U of R president Vianne Timmons expressed measured appreciation for the funding increase while speaking to a cluster of reporters after the announcement. Timmons said the U of R's share of the \$9.2 million amounts to less than two per cent of the



Don Morgan is questioned by reporters about the funding allocations for Saskatchewan's universities. Photo by Dietrich Neu

university's total budget.

"An increase of under two per cent means that we have to find ways to save money on our campus," she said. "Through attrition we have been reducing our workforce and will continue to do so."

The U of R's 2012-13 budget already accounted for the lack of funding, which was predicted by university administration long before budget day.

Administration eliminated 25 faculty and staff positions in the 2012-13 fiscal year, and cut the university's budget by \$3.4 million.

Further cuts this year will allow the university to balance the books, however most faculty budgets will not cover inflationary costs for supplies and materials. According to the U of R's operations forecast, staff layoffs will account for some savings but also results in enrolment reductions, which "compounds the revenue challenge" by reducing the university's income from tuition.

"What we are going to see is students paying more for less," said Warren McCall, official critic of advanced education. "If the quality of the education is diminished, and

the ability for students to access it is curtailed, that is a problem."

The U of R administration said in their operations forecast that they have almost completely exhausted their ability to reduce costs through staff layoffs, and students can expect a higher-than-normal tuition hike next year to make up the difference – business students can expect an increase of nine per cent. Without a high tuition hike, the university would have to cut over \$5 million in 2013-14.

"Student debt is already at an average of \$37,000, that is a lot of money," said Kent Peterson, national representative of CFS Saskatchewan. "(Tuition increases) make education even more inaccessible to folks. It will have detrimental effects, especially on Aboriginal learners."

The provincial government has told university administration that this level of funding increase will become the norm for years to come; when coupled with the rise of inflation, further budget slashing could be in store for Regina's only university.

"It is getting really tough," Timmons said when asked about the possibility of making additional budget cuts. "We have pretty well cut almost everywhere we can in terms of efficiencies. We are a very lean institution."

"If this is a trend we've got some tough sluggin' ahead."

Health budget provides less money for drug plan

Kristen McEwen
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Within the 2013–14 Saskatchewan provincial budget, an approximate \$10 million cut is in store for the Saskatchewan Prescription Drug Plan - but it's not all bad news, according to government sources.

Health Minister Dustin Duncan said that amount of money is a result of drug patents ending and more generic drugs coming available on the market.

The reduction in funds is also a result of a generic drug initiative the Saskatchewan government has partnered with other provinces across the country. The goal of the initiative is to price six generic drugs at approximately 18 per cent of brand drugs.

"What's happening is not a lessening of utilization but we're getting a better price for drugs that are on the drug plan," Duncan said.

According to the budget summary, the government would be saving a total of \$20 million in initiatives to lower prices on generic drugs.

The \$10 million in cuts is included in this figure, Duncan said.

The leftover estimation of \$10 million is a result of "increased utilization with the growing population," he said.

While more inexpensive drugs will be available on the market thanks to the nationwide generic drug initiative, SEIU-West president Barbara Cape said the partnership



SEIU-West president Barbara Cape says the government needs to invest in people as much as it invests in its infrastrucutre. Photo by Kristen McEwen

between provinces needs to go further to help people who need a larger and more affordable drug coverage.

"We invest in business, we invest in infrastructure, we need to invest in the people of this province," Cape said. "And the government made a baby step towards there but this government especially is in a fabulous position to make bigger leaps towards building a better province for the people of the province not just for the businesses we have."

In Regional Health Services, each health

authority across the province received an increase in funding. The Saskatchewan Cancer Agency also received an increase of approximately \$11 million, although the agency has been asked to look for cuts in the coming year.

Meanwhile, Regional Targeted Programs and Services will receive a \$40 million cut. The Regional Targeted Programs and Services provide additional funds to health regions for certain programs such as the Saskatchewan Surgical Initiative.

Projects like the Surgical Initiative will be receiving less money from Regional Targeted Programs and Services because it requires less money, Duncan said.

Last fiscal year, \$27 million was allocated for the Saskatchewan Surgical Initiative in the province. This year, the program is receiving \$10 million.

The base operating budget for the Regional Health Authorities will increase by \$131.8 million, or 4.5 per cent for this year. The base operating budgets of the health regions will now include some program expenses.

"It's not that there aren't programs that haven't been renewed but in some cases those programs were targeted programs that are now part of the base budget for the region," Duncan said.

The Regional Health Authorities and the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency are also required this year to find \$53.9 million in savings.

"We see health regions and the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency having to make cuts and look for reductions and that's a concern because that will affect patient care," NDP leader Cam Broten said.

Critics oppose cuts to climate change projects



NDP finance critic Trent Wotherspoon says climate change cuts don't make sense. Photo by Julia Dima

Julia Dima
@JuliaVDima

The provincial budget for Saskatchewan has been released and the minister of environment, Ken Cheveldayoff is pleased. Environment critics are not.

The ministry of environment is facing an approximate decrease of \$2.6 million in expense funds compared to last year's provincial budget.

"We'll manage with a little less money, and continue to meet our goals. We're working with industries across Saskatchewan to ensure we can do that," said Cheveldayoff.

The budget includes just over \$1 million less for the provincial climate change plan and \$1.3 million for environmental protection.

The reductions are significantly smaller

than last year's, when the climate change plan, in particularly the Go Green program, was cut by \$11 million. This year's climate change plan budget is \$4.3 million, down from \$5.4 million last year.

Ken Cheveldayoff said climate change programming is a priority for the government, but they have also had to make some tough decisions in the budget.

"Climate change in Saskatchewan still has a strong budget ... and we're going to continue to make sure that environmental stewardship is a priority for our government," he said.

The NDP critic for the environment, Cathy Sproule, said the government is not moving in a good direction with the budgetary cuts to climate change programs.

"Clearly, there is a decline in financial support for environmental protections, and I am very unhappy about that ...

particularly in the area of climate change," she said.

"There's a lot we need to learn on our side, but also this government is just not doing its research on climate change."

Other members of the NDP are also not impressed with the cuts to environment. NDP finance critic Trent Wotherspoon said this budget is a disappointment for the people of Saskatchewan who care about the environment.

"It just doesn't make sense to be cutting initiatives to stem climate change," he said.

Meanwhile, the budget provides some additional spending in the form of a \$500,000 increase to the Multi-material Waste Recycling Program, a 4.5 per cent increase to SARCAN, and \$800,000 of funding to the multi-species action plan, boreal caribou research, and abandoned site assessment. Sproule feels these

programs are distractions from larger concerns, however.

"I think that's just tinkering with the edges. There's no meaningful approach to protecting our environment there," she said.

Wotherspoon recognizes the good of these increases, but says it's not enough.

"Those programs have merit, but we have to have meaningful action on climate change, and a cut budget doesn't cut it," he said.

Environmentalist Jim Elliott is concerned about these decisions to cut from climate change funding, and also feels the additional programs are not targeting the issues of climate change in the province.

"The environmental protection needs to be increased. The little bit of additions don't deal with the broader impact of climate change," he said.

Increased funding for nuclear development

Braden Dupuis
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The Government of Saskatchewan is increasing its investment in nuclear research and development.

According to the 2013-14 provincial budget, Innovation Saskatchewan will be receiving just over \$28 million – an increase of \$21.2 million over last year's budget.

Over \$16 million of the funding will go toward a Cyclotron – a type of particle accelerator used for nuclear physics experiments.

The rest will go toward the Sylvia Fedoruk Canadian Centre for Nuclear Innovation at the University of Saskatchewan.

While the opposition NDP disagreed with many facets of the tabled budget, the increased funding for Innovation

Saskatchewan offered, at least in part, an air of uniformity.

"I think in terms of medical isotopes, that's important nuclear research, and it's certainly something that I think our party would support," said Cathy Sproule, the NDP's critic for the environment.

While Sproule believes medical research is worth the NDP's support, the lack of concrete information concerning the nature of the nuclear research leaves the opposition with some doubt.

"We haven't seen anything else in terms of what the substance of the research is going to be," Sproule said.

"I'm not sure if they have a definite plan on where this research is going, but we'll certainly be watching it."

The budget also provides a new royalty structure to encourage uranium development, with a view to its potential for nuclear power.



NDP critic for the environment Cathy Sproule. Photo by Chelan Skulski

"The budget introduces a modernization of the uranium royalty regime in order to encourage increased investment in northern Saskatchewan," according to

the budget summary.

"We feel that uranium is a very clean, non-emitting source of energy, and that's why we're supporting it," said Environment Minister Ken Cheveldayoff.

"Cameco does a great job in our province, and also on the aboriginal front, employing aboriginal people, Cameco is a leader in our country, so we're happy to support the industry as well," he said.

Increased uranium mining in the north will benefit the province's aboriginal population through employment and training, said Dave McIlmoyl of northern-based NRT Trucking.

"Nearly 50 per cent of people working at the mines are residents of northern Saskatchewan," McIlmoyl said.

"They live and work in the North, and anything that's good for the uranium mining industry benefits northern Saskatchewan, so that's very positive."

Agricultural budget sees highs and lows

Chelan Skulski
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The 2013 agriculture budget is leaving farmers with mixed feelings.

The ministry of agriculture received a record \$198.3 million in crop insurance funding as well as \$6.5 million designated to crop research. However, the ministry will experience an overall decrease in funding of approximately \$23 million.

Specific programs seeing cuts include regional services, by \$11 million, and business risk management by \$39 million.

“It’s going to have a serious effect I think, if the disaster relief isn’t there, which I think was cut last year, if all they have is crop insurance, then in terms of business risk management it is going to be really difficult for a lot of producers,” said NDP agriculture critic Cathy Sproule.

Growing Forward 2, an agreement between federal and provincial governments, is seeing provincial cuts before the program launches on April 1, 2013. AgriStability is being decreased by \$52.5 million and AgriInvest will be cut by \$10.2 million.

AgriStability is a program through which governments provide a share of lost income to protect farmers from large declines of farm income. AgriInvest encourages farmers to set money aside for income shortfalls and invest in on-farm risk.

“We would have liked to see an increase in the AgriInvest portion, just because it was a program that everybody liked. All we can hope for is that we don’t have a huge wreck and that the value of the commodities stays where it is and everyone can make a little money,” said Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities president David Marit.

With cuts to these programs and business



SARM President, David Marit, right, is pleased with crop insurance funding. Photo by Chelan Skulski

risk management, farmers might be left in deep waters with spring flooding due to record snowfall this winter.

Norm Hall, president of Agricultural Production Association Society, commented on the issue.

“Well in areas like my own, we have already had three years of flooding, so we are as prepared as we are going to get. In the west side of the province, they went into the fall a lot drier; hopefully a lot of water will soak into the ground. But on the eastern half of the province we aren’t near as dry and there is very good possibility of severe flooding all depending on when the melt hits.”

Prior to budget day, farmers were already aware of the \$6.5 million funding increase into crop research. This funding was provided

for research into new technology and addressing genetic diseases.

“It was good to see the government is acknowledging the new genetics coming out of farming practices and having the producer yield jump up. It is a positive step just reflecting the agronomics and genetics of the plants we are using now,” said Kenton Possberg, vice-president of the Western Canadian Wheat Growers.

Lyle Stewart, minister of agriculture, is excited about research funding.

“That is huge. In order to meet the growth plan targets of 50 per cent more production by 2020, research is going to be a valuable piece of that. Research, irrigation, everything we can do to increase production we are going to try to do..

The trouble with research is you don’t get instant gratification, you put the money up front and five years down the road you start to see the results trickling out but it is money so well spent,” he said.

The government did allocate \$3 million to the Global Institute for Food Security. This program is perhaps seeing more attention since the record-breaking exports of \$11 billion in agricultural food products in 2012.

According to the Saskatchewan Plan for Growth, the province is aiming for \$15 billion in agri-food exports by 2020. Top agricultural exports for Saskatchewan include wheat, canola oil, durum and lentils.

New Sask pension plan ‘smoke and mirrors’

by Shinoah Young
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The Legislative Building in Regina was swarming with media and onlookers Tuesday, March 20 as Hon. Ken Krawetz announced Saskatchewan’s 2013 budget report. The budget includes a new pension plan known as a Pooled Registered Pension Plan or PRPP.

“What we see in Saskatchewan is we have the Saskatchewan Pension Plan (SPP) for years, it’s going to be a little bit different than that. This is a pension plan that is voluntary for those who might be employees of a small business where there is no pension, there are no contributions by the employer,” said Krawetz.

Employees will have the option to sign into the plan, he added

“The most important ones of course are the self-employed. Self-employed people don’t have the ability to be in a pension plan unless they join a massive one so this will provide that opportunity,” said Krawetz.

However, Saskatchewan Federation of Labour president Larry Hubich said, “They should have moved towards improving the Canada Pension Plan (CPP).”

“The changes are smoke and mirrors. The announcement of the PRPP is, in my humble opinion, a useless announcement. It accomplishes and achieves nothing and it is a way to obscure the fact that the provincial government has backed away from supporting real improvements to pensions in this country, which would be to improve the Canada Pension Plan,” said Hubich.

“What the PRPP is, is simply a group RRSP. It’s not going to mean any new money at all in the system. It’s not going to do anything to improve people’s retirement income,” said Hubich.



Finance Minister Ken Krawetz talks to reporters at the legislature after the budget announcement on March 20. Photo by Shinoah Young

“In Canada there’s already half a trillion dollars worth of unused RRSP room and so creating yet another modified RRSP will just add to that already existing problem,” he said.

Hubich said the SFL would prefer improvements to CPP, which requires employers to match workers’ contributions dollar for dollar.

“These PRPP’s are only contributed to by individual workers, there’s no mandatory re-

quirement that employers contribute,” he said.

“A couple of provinces have been sucked into it. Unfortunately I had hoped Saskatchewan wouldn’t be sucked into that, but it appears that they now have,” said Hubich.

Meanwhile, Krawetz said the PRPP will make people more aware of the need to save for retirement.

“This is going to be another tool, another quiver, that will help people understand their

financial literacy,” he said.

“Having another savings account that you can put your money into doesn’t create any new money and that’s what they’ve done,” countered Hubich. “So instead of having this safety deposit box you now have two safety deposit boxes, you can pick which one you want to put your money into.”

City of Regina sees more money from province

Eric Bell
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The City of Regina is set to get some extra money from the province to help balance the books, with a municipal revenue sharing increase of 11.4 per cent being allocated to the city in the 2013 provincial budget.

Minister of government relations Jim Reiter said that the increase will allow urban centres such as Regina and Saskatoon to use the extra money for whatever they see necessary.

“Cities can use this money for operating, they can use it for capital, they can use it to target specific programs certainly it’s their choice, it’s unconditional,” said Reiter.

“The amount of money they receive is based on one per cent of the PST, so as our economy grows, their share of revenue grows as well.”

Regina’s portion of municipal revenue sharing has grown substantially, climbing from \$15.75 million in 2007, to \$41.07 million in 2013.

Mayor Michael Fougere was happy with



Regina mayor Michael Fougere is pleased with the decision to increase municipal revenue sharing by 11.4 per cent. Photo by Eric Bell

the outcome of the budget, citing infrastructure as his main priority.

“Our revenue goes from about \$38 million to about \$41 million for this year, so we are going to see an increase and are very pleased,” said Fougere, noting that there had been competition between rural, northern, and urban communities for the funds.

NDP government relations critic Trent Wotherspoon said that while municipal revenue sharing is important for all Saskatchewan communities, most of the money goes toward operations, and not infrastructure development.

“What we have to understand is this revenue is solely for operations and entirely utilized for operations, so what we don’t

have is any new dollars for infrastructure, leaving a shortfall for many of our communities and a burden that’s going to be felt by taxpayers,” Wotherspoon said.

“So, for sidewalks, sewers, all that important infrastructure, there’s no meaningful planning on that part.”

The pace of development may be hindered by how much we receive on the infrastructure side, and we will continue to make that our priority as a council.”

“Cities can use this money for operating, they can use it for capital, they can use it to target specific programs. Certainly it’s their choice, it’s unconditional.

- Jim Reiter

In total, \$264 million in municipal revenue sharing will be distributed to cities and towns across the province, an increase of almost 50 per cent since 2007.

Warman, Saskatchewan’s newest city, will receive its first revenue sharing payment of \$1.51 million this year.



Childcare gets funding boost

Iryn Tushabe
@wordswearer

The more you make, the more you spend. This continues to be particularly true for middle income families in need of childcare in Saskatchewan.

The provincial 2013-14 budget provides \$2.3 million dollars of new funding towards creation of 500 additional child care spaces, operating funding for existing licensed daycares, and capital support for eligible school-based sites.

But the Child Care Subsidy program has been reduced by \$2 million from \$18 million last year to \$16 million in this budget.

The Child Care Subsidy program is a monthly subsidy that helps Saskatchewan families meet the costs of childcare by paying a portion of the fee directly to the licensed childcare facility.

According to June Draude, minister of social services, the reason for the decrease in child care subsidies is that more families now have a higher income which disqualifies them from accessing the subsidy.

“What’s happening is that more families are making higher incomes, so the subsidy they get isn’t as high as their income has increased. But the people who are low income will keep getting enough subsidy,” she said.

But Danielle Chartier, New Democratic Deputy caucus chair and critic for early learning and childcare, sees a problem with the system.

“As income keeps going up, the government needs to ensure that the parameters for the program change to reflect that. The reality is that at \$1,640 a month, families start to lose the maximum status subsidy and that hasn’t changed since 1983, so fewer and fewer people qualify for subsidies which is a

problem for families,” she said.

“Low income people struggle but the middle income group really struggles too. I was talking to someone yesterday who spends \$1,200 in childcare a month, which is a lot of money. That’s a huge chunk of these families’ budgets,” said Chartier.

For Chartier, the additional 500 daycare spaces are not nearly enough to meet Saskatchewan’s growing population.

“If you look at 15,000 live childbirths here in the province, 500 new daycare (spaces) is a drop in the bucket and doesn’t even touch the need. There are already long waiting lists everywhere,” she said.

According to Chartier, supporting childcare is not only good for the families but for the province’s economic development as well.

“People can’t stay in paid labour if they can’t find a daycare. If people can’t find childcare or if it becomes too expensive for them,

you might just as well stay home and that’s what some people are doing,” she said.

University of Regina President, Vianne Timmons, anticipates that the government will fund construction of a new daycare facility on campus to cater to the growing need for childcare spots for students with children.

“In our new residence plan we have additional spots, so that will double the daycare spots on campus to 180. And still it won’t meet the need, but it’s a great investment,” said Timmons.

The combined number of families on the waiting lists for both Oasis and Wascana Childcare Co-ops, the University’s two day-cares, is up to 1,000.

Budget increases funding to women’s shelters



June Draude, minister of social services, takes questions from the media at the legislature. Photo by Maureen Mugerwa

Arielle Zerr
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Hot on the heels of a Statistics Canada report that showed Saskatchewan having the highest rates of domestic abuse against women in the whole country, the Saskatchewan government has increased funding for provincial women’s shelters.

During his budget speech Wednesday, Finance Minister Ken Krawetz announced the funding of a new transition house in Melfort that will be available for women in northeast Saskatchewan. The construction cost of the new shelter will be shared between the government and the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation.

According to Louise Schweitzer, executive director of North East Outreach and Support Services, the new transition house in Melfort will fill a need in the area.

“The closest (transition house) is in Prince Albert and they currently run at about 99 per cent capacity. So it’s very hard when we get women to the point

where they seek shelter and then not be able to assist them in finding shelter,” she said.

The original proposal for Melfort’s transition house went to the government in September 2010. Despite the wait, Schweitzer is still thankful for the funding, which she feels will be life-changing for the women who access the shelter.

“I feel it gives them a chance at hope, leaving an unsafe situation and giving their children a chance to live domestic violence-free,” said Schweitzer.

In addition to Melfort’s new transition house, the Saskatchewan government has increased the money going to all the province’s women’s shelters by \$800,000. This brings the provincial funding up to \$7.6 million.

Social Services Minister June Draude said the increased funding shows the government’s commitment to women. She also noted that in light of Saskatchewan’s high rate of domestic violence that was outlined in the Statistics Canada report, the government will be looking for more solutions.

“That’s one of the issues that as a government that the premier has tasked us all with. This is not a statistic we’re proud of,” said Draude.

“So I’m working with my colleagues to come up with a plan to say, ‘How can we change where we are right now?’”

Social services critic Danielle Chartier said the budget is not doing enough for women in domestic violence situations.

“Not only is it (about) opening more beds but ensuring there are good supports for people to feel like they can earn a living on their own. There are so many things that keep people in family violence situations so I think that dealing

with some of those social determinants of health is really important, too - housing costs, education and those kinds of things,” said Chartier.

And in a province where the occurrence of domestic violence is nearly double the rest of the country, Chartier said we should be doing a lot more.



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FSIN wants revenue sharing to be priority



FSIN Chief Perry Bellegarde wants revenue sharing to be a priority. Photo by Shinoah Young

by Penny Smoke
@onecent4u

First Nations leaders of Saskatchewan are pleased with the commitments to education and employment, but still wonder why there is no revenue sharing from the provincial government in this year’s 2013-2014 budget.

Reporters and politicians gathered on March 20, 2013, at the Saskatchewan legislative building to find out what this year’s themed “Balanced Growth” budget had in store.

Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) Chief Perry Bellegarde reiterated at the gathering that revenue sharing must be a priority for First Nations people.

Chief Bellegarde also acknowledged the fact that the cost of First Nations being unemployed and on social assistance, as well as in the justice system is too high.

He said that investing in programs such

as education, justice and the health sector is something that will help the province achieve its economic potential.

“First Nations people aren’t asking for a special deal. All we are asking for is that Canada’s constitution is respected, the right of Indigenous people to be respected, and treaty rights to be honored, respected and implemented ... And so people in Saskatchewan have to get their heads around that, because when you start looking at really key concepts like resource revenue sharing that’s going to start creating economic certainty in this province and that’s going to be good for everybody,” said Chief Bellegarde.

“We’ve got to start looking at key investment sectors. Having said that, I can acknowledge this government has put \$3 million in place for the joint task force recommendation implementations on education, so that’s a positive step, but there still exists a huge socioeconomic gap that needs to be addressed really strategically.”

The provincial government has set aside \$3 million to follow up on the recommendations of a joint task force that is looking into ways to implement programs and initiatives to improve education and employment for First Nations people of Saskatchewan.

“I think it speaks to the importance of First Nations and Métis people to this government and the commitment to making opportunities available for them to be engaged in the economy,” said Jim Reiter, minister of First Nations and Métis relations.

“As for revenue sharing off-reserve, First Nations are benefiting from that fund because they are living in our cities, towns and municipalities, so all citizens benefit from the revenue sharing.

The cities will see grants go up by \$5 million this year, so First Nations will benefit with all the other citizens.”

Whatcha say?

What are your thoughts about the sin tax increase in the 2013-14 budget?



“I think it’s all right. I’m a non-smoker so cigarettes don’t bother me at all. I drink a little bit. The little they’re adding on doesn’t cause any grief at all.”

Gerald



“I’m all for that. It’s good because it’ll get people to quit smoking. I like it, they should keep raising taxes so more people will quit.”

Chad



“I’m all for taxing them. However, I think if they’re going to do that, I think especially with smoking then they need to figure out something to make all the products for quitting smoking cheaper and I think that they do need to have something in place that sort of evens it out.”

Michelle

Sin Tax Facts

Saskatchewan’s 2013-14 Budget saw the tobacco tax increased by four cents per cigarette.

Alcohol taxes were increased by three per cent.

Sin taxes were raised to combat the high number of 15-19 year-old smokers in Saskatchewan.

The government expects to receive \$47.5 million in additional tobacco revenue in 2013-14

The last sin tax hike was \$5.40 a carton in 2010. This year’s increase was \$8 per carton.

The most recent study revealed that 25.7 per cent of Sask. residents smoke

Arts board making up for some hard hits

Megan Narsing
@Spider_Meg

Last year the abolishment of the film tax credit left the film community crippled. This year, the 2013 provincial budget has increased funding to other arts initiatives in hopes of sewing up some of those wounds.

The Saskatchewan Arts Board received a five per cent increase, putting its budget at \$6.8 million.

"We actually out-performed the provincial budget (in terms of increases). So we have no issue at all with the size of the allocation. We are quite grateful for that," said David Kyle, executive director of the arts board.

"The money will go directly into the pockets of people who will use it right away."

Overall, the expense budget for the ministry of parks, culture and sport increased by 8.8 per cent, or \$8.5 million. This includes the Creative Saskatchewan Project, which will provide \$5 million to work alongside the Saskatchewan Arts Board to nourish the province's arts community.

"We are really excited to be working with an entity that has marketing and market development mandate," Kyle said.

"We are really focused on the creation of arts and working with artists, working with organizations."

But it's not all happy news. The film tax credit was cut even more as it comes into its final two years before being completely removed. However, even with its removal, the minister of parks, culture and sport, Kevin Doherty, insists that there is still money out there for film.

"There is still a budget of \$5 million in the budget for film tax credits, which is higher



Alan Bratt, president of the Saskatchewan branch of ACTRA, speaks out to reporters about the loss in the film industry. Photo by Megan Narsing

than it has been in the 14 years of film tax history," said Doherty.

"With the \$5 million we have coming in this fiscal year for the film industry as well as the availability of the \$5 million in the Creative Saskatchewan fund, I think it's a great new source of funding"

But the new Creative Saskatchewan endeavour barely scratches the surface, according to Alan Bratt, president of the Saskatchewan branch of ACTRA, the actors' union.

"It is a loss. They made a horrible mistake in axing the tax credit," Bratt said.

"I'm glad for the other artists... but we (the film industry) were bringing in six-fold to what the government was investing with the tax credit and it was lost. And this (Creative Saskatchewan) is not going to replace that because \$5 million is going to be divided between all the other arts. And that's not going to bring in the sort of work we had previously."

Doherty admitted the gap tax credit left will never be completely filled but the government has successfully "established a new support mechanism now from the province

for all of our creative industries."

Another significant cut was delivered to the Conexus Arts Centre. Fifty per cent of its government funding was removed, and by next year it will be off the government's budget completely.

"We want to see you move to a system whereby you're fully functional, fully operational and fully self-sustaining without any provincial taxpayers' support," Doherty said.

It is the only provincially-funded arts centre and the government decided it was time it stood on its own two feet, he said.

Creative Saskatchewan sharing funds

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The arts in this province have been a target over the past year, receiving many cuts to various programs and funding.

As a result, many people have had to leave the province in hopes of finding work elsewhere while others have chosen to stay and deal with reduced funding allocations.

In the 2013-14 provincial budget, support of the provincial arts and cultural organizations are still intact, according to Kevin Doherty, minister of parks, culture and sport.

"We took the creative and sustainability fund of \$1.5 million out and put it into Creative Saskatchewan, so it still exists in there, where it appropriately should be," said Doherty. The total budget for Creative Saskatchewan is \$5 million.

According to a press release from the Government of Saskatchewan, the government is supportive of the creative industries through the creative industry growth and sustainability program. The purpose of this program is to strengthen "the commercial viability of the creative industries."

Culture on the Go is a touring and market development program which partners

between the Saskatchewan Arts Board and the ministry of parks, culture and sport. This particular program helps make it possible for Saskatchewan artists to further their careers and share art, music and performances with people in the province.

Creative Saskatchewan is going to be responsible for sharing the funds that are put into it among the different arts and cultural organizations, said Doherty.

"If you want to support your people you're going to have to play with them," said Alan Bratt, president of the Saskatchewan branch of ACTRA.

ACTRA is the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists. The film tax credit affects ACTRA because they are a union for cinema, television and radio artists.

Many people have left the province because of the lack of funding to the arts and cultural industries.

"That is terrible business to chase away investment. That's terrible business to get rid of talented business," said Bratt.

He does not think that Creative Saskatchewan is enough to bring back the people in the film industry who have already left but he is happy for those who will be part of the \$5 million "pot."



David Kyle, left, executive director of the Saskatchewan Arts Board, takes in the 2013 budget announcement. The Creative Saskatchewan Project received an increase of \$1.5 million. Photo by Shinoah Young

The government is "helping to support a number of significant events taking place across Saskatchewan in 2013-14 which include: The Junos, Canada's music awards; the

Canadian Hockey League's Memorial Cup; and the Canadian Football League's Grey Cup game," the budget states.